

Standard words – new breeding techniques

Issue:

Claims have been made that FSANZ and the OGTR are planning to deregulate a range of gene editing techniques such as oligo-directed mutagenesis, zinc finger nuclease technology and CRISPR.

Response:

There has been some debate, both within Australia and internationally, as to whether certain new breeding techniques (NBTs), such as gene editing, come within the scope of legal definitions for genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and GM food.

In Australia, the relevant definitions for GMOs are contained in the *Gene Technology Act 2000* (GT Act, administered by the OGTR) and for GM foods are contained in Standard 1.5.2 of the *Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code* (the Code, administered by FSANZ).

The OGTR and FSANZ have been liaising closely on this issue for a number of years, as well as keeping track of international developments.

In 2012 and 2013, FSANZ hosted two technical workshops with invited experts to consider scientific issues associated with foods produced using NBTs. Reports from both workshops are available on the FSANZ website. One of the scientific conclusions from the workshops was that foods derived from some NBTs should not be considered as GM because the food products would be very similar or no different to conventionally bred foods.

FSANZ has carefully considered the workshop conclusions but has not made a decision about the legal status of any NBT. This is because Australian state and territory government agencies are responsible for enforcing and interpreting the Code, including interpretation of whether any of the new techniques are captured under Standard 1.5.2. The Australian Government Department of Agriculture has this responsibility for imported food.

None of the regulatory authorities responsible for enforcing and interpreting Standard 1.5.2 has asked for that Standard to be amended because of this issue. No application has been received by FSANZ for a food derived from any NBT and FSANZ currently has no plans itself to initiate work to change Standard 1.5.2 to exclude such techniques from its scope. Any proposed changes to the Code are considered through a public process, and include public consultation.

Should FSANZ receive a relevant application for a food derived from one of the NBTs, FSANZ has publicly stated it will have regard to the conclusions of its 2012 and 2013 technical workshops, in deciding whether to accept the application for assessment under Standard 1.5.2.

In the interim, FSANZ and the OGTR will continue to liaise closely on this issue.